

Approved For Release 1999/09/21 : CIA-RDP75-0014

U.S. Dilemma in Saigon

Ruling Family Hails Nolting Support, But People Deplore His Stress on War

By DAVID HALBERSTAM

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, Vietnam, Aug. 4 — In his last days here as United States Ambassador, Frederick E. Nolting Jr. has inadvertently become the center of a political controversy that not only is embarrassing to him but has broad implications for the future.

Mr. Nolting, who put in more than two difficult and taxing years trying to implement American policy in the face of an often unyielding ally, finds himself attacked by Buddhist leaders and other Vietnamese, and lavishly praised by some pro-Government elements.

This came about because of an interview Mr. Nolting gave a reporter here. The interview was widely heralded in the press last week in the midst of the lingering political crisis between the Buddhist majority and the Ngo family's Government.

Mr. Nolting said that in his time here he had never seen any evidence of religious persecution.

General Attitude Disturbing

To Buddhist leaders this was a gratuitous entrance into a highly emotional dispute, and they bitterly attacked Mr. Nolting. To many other Vietnamese it was not so much this specific reference but rather the entire context of the interview that was disturbing.

In their estimation, and that of many American observers here, that Mr. Nolting was saying was this: The Buddhist question is really a small thing; the important thing is winning the war, and people should turn their attention on that.

This touched a sensitive nerve. A growing number of Vietnamese in vital places feel that this too closely characterizes American policy here: total preoccupation with the difficult and very real war with the Communist guerrillas, and unwillingness to face the harsh reality that they are dealing with a Government that has lost the confidence of a large segment of the population.

Family Stand Is Issue

To most Vietnamese, Buddhist or Catholic, who know something about the "Buddhist affair," the question is important not because it is or is not religious persecution, but because it is clear illustration of their Government's reactions in internal affairs and the aloofness of the ruling family.

Official said recently, "During the French Indochina war they told us to fight the Communists for the French, and afterward they would get us good government."

"Now they tell us to fight the Communists for Ngo Dinh Diem and when there is peacetime they will get us a good government. We are no longer interested in their advice."

Vietnamese are no longer interested in hearing Americans tell them that the war is really the important business at hand and that it is time to buckle down to the business of being anti-Communist.

U.S. May Feel Displeasure

Rather, and this is considered serious by some Americans in high places, the Vietnamese are warning the Americans that the population's feeling toward the Government may soon extend to the Americans, the Government's main base of support, if things continue as they are now.

A second serious aspect of Mr. Nolting's speech and one or two other recent developments is that they have underlined how little room for maneuver there now is for American officials trying to deal with both the Government and the people.

The Ngo family is not going to be known that it intends to accept little less than the Ambassador like Mr. Nolting, who makes an all-out attack along with the first family. While the people may not be known that they are not approve of American representatives only the Ngo family.

This week The Times of Vietnam, an English-language daily that hews to the Government line, called Mr. Nolting "the first American Ambassador to Vietnam really worthy of being addressed by his title," and said Henry Cabot Lodge, the new Ambassador, had "mighty big shoes to fill."

At the same time, members of the Ngo family were visiting the Embassy knew that they were far from satisfied with the representation of Vietnam Trueheart, deputy Chief of Mission here, and Charles Trueheart during six weeks of Buddhist protest while Mr. Nolting was on vacation.

Mr. Trueheart has the difficult task of trying to induce some flexibility in the Government's attitude, including that Washington is going to dissociate itself from the Ngo family. Mr. Trueheart was a member of the Ngo family and was considered a "pro-Buddhist" heart.

STATINT

CPYRGHT

Approved For Release 1999/09/21 : CIA-RDP75-0014

000600010043-1